

Memo to
Brzezinski
4-17-78

Washington, D.C. 20505

17 April 1978

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MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Zbigniew Brzezinski
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT: Political Intelligence and Analysis

Analysis

We have carefully considered your memorandum of 14 January. We welcome your confirmation of the utility of political analysis in general and of problem-oriented and over-the-horizon assessments in particular. And we share your concern about the need to increase the effectiveness of our product. We agree, too, with the broad thrust of your comments on the kinds of analytic improvements that are required. In good measure these improvements will require internal changes, particularly as they bear on analysts' incentives and intellectual styles. But improvements in our interactions with policy consumers also are needed.

The character of our interactions with consumers largely shapes our analytical endeavors. A large part of our political analysis effort necessarily goes into current intelligence—monitoring and assessing fast-breaking developments that affect US interests. Here, in addition to the President's Daily Brief and the National Intelligence Daily, we produce a very large volume of ad hoc written and oral analyses, usually at the request of one of your staff officers or of a policy official from the Departments of State, Defense, Treasury or Energy. Our political analysts are particularly responsive to such direct requests for information and analysis. Naturally and inevitably much of this work is not specifically labelled as a CIA input by the time it is included in policy papers. Nonetheless, it helps in the policy making process.

We also produce a small but growing volume of problem- or issue-oriented analyses, which assess the short-term environment—locally, regionally, or globally—for particular US policy initiatives. Usually undertaken at the initiative of a policy official, the subjects range from the attitudes of individual countries on our arms control and non-proliferation initiatives to the response of the LDCs as a bloc to our proposals in the North-South dialogue. Our capacity to perform this function in a timely and well-focused manner depends critically on our access to information about the US options under consideration.

We also provide a good number of future-oriented assessments, both formally and informally. You are correct in noting, however, that the incidence of future-oriented political analysis is comparatively low. Consumer reactions to speculative forward-looking efforts traditionally have not been such as to encourage analysts to develop that analytical genre. Formally published pieces of that type often are cautious,

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reflecting both the leavening effects of the bureaucratic process as well as the inherent large substantive uncertainties involved in such work. Informal speculations are often solicited by NSC staffers as well as other policy officers. Here responses usually are much more venturesome, whether addressing future events in a region or the likely foreign reaction to a US initiative. This difference suggests the importance of finding a forum appropriate for stimulating a higher degree of analytical risk-taking.

Certain subjects—for example, the policy making processes of key countries and their leaders' perceptions of the international environment and US policy—are particularly difficult to assess effectively. Here we engage in a sustained program of political research to improve our analytic base, especially on the complex political dynamics of the USSR and China. With respect to the latter two, as you are well aware, the data limitations are and will continue to be severe.

Finally, with respect to internal measures for improving the quality of our political analysis and the capabilities of our analysts, some of the initiatives now in train are outlined below. I have attached a longer paper from Robert Bowie to me (Attachment 1) that includes more detail and some milestones for the achievement of our objectives. Moreover, this subject will be considered for the Intelligence Community as a whole by the PRC(I).

Policy Relevance

Regarding your main criticism, we place the highest priority on making our analysis as policy-relevant as possible, given the constraints within which we must operate. Because we are not usually engaged directly in policy formulation, we are not as well informed on the state of policy play as are other agencies. While this detachment strengthens the credibility of our role as a disinterested assessor of the international environment as it impacts on US policy choices, it also increases the risk that our work will be viewed as irrelevant. We need certain kinds of external assistance to reduce this risk.

First, we need credible and timely guidelines on a manageable number of mid- to long-term priorities in order effectively to plan our distribution of effort and development of talent. The recent exercise that created lists of national intelligence topics of long-term and current interest is responsive to this need. It is important that these lists genuinely reflect the concerns of top policy makers. To place certain resource bets against the future, the more precise guidance we receive the better.

The PRC and SCC agendas are useful but limited guidelines to immediate priorities. We frequently provide intelligence assessments to the

assigned drafters of position papers. We also routinely respond to the drafts of these papers, both before and at the meetings. And we use our gleanings from the process to add relevance to our subsequent analytical work on the subjects addressed.

But we need to be informed on a continuing basis about the specific contents and time frame of policy considerations where an input of political analysis would be useful. In a number of cases we have effective regularized relations with your staff officers (we could cite East Asia as an example). We constantly emphasize the importance of such contacts to our analysts, and we welcome your efforts to stimulate the process from your end.

In addition, we need better access to [] traffic and closely-held MEMCONS (including White House-controlled communications on matters of high priority interest). []

[] We are largely cut off from White House-controlled appreciations of various issues. Greater availability would help make our analysis not only more policy relevant, but more accurate, as well.

Finally, we need continual critical feedback from all levels of the policy community on the utility of the subjects we address, the analytical approaches we take, and the substantive judgments we make. We know how time-consuming this can be; but just as relevant answers require pointed questions, good writers need critical reviewers.

We feel rather strongly that a modest number of broad estimative papers are useful to produce because they help shape within the larger intelligence community a shared set of assumptions and judgments and to make explicit and define more sharply differences that may exist. If well executed, these broad estimates can serve the same purpose within the policy community, periodically promoting internal dialogue on basic assumptions about policy that otherwise takes place only piecemeal and in fragmented fashion, if at all. There is, moreover, a strong demand for such products from policy consumers at echelons of government below your level for whom such estimates are an integral part of their policy making process.

The great bulk of our product, however, is highly specific, performed on short deadlines, and often—as mentioned—absorbed without attribution into the overall factual and analytical bank informing the policy process. Our responsibility to provide timely political intelligence does not permit us to collect and hoard data for long periods in order to write occasional "breakthrough" analyses. Rather, we quickly and repeatedly transmit our findings and judgments based on each important new increment of data and insight. As a result, we and our consumers improve our knowledge and understanding continually, but usually without the sense of

dramatic revelation that may attach to a single integrative piece of work based on a protracted research period in which no incremental analysis has been produced. We recognize, however, that this is not the most effective way to accumulate knowledge; and we intend to encourage more analyses at a level of generality that falls somewhere between current intelligence and cosmic estimates.

Speculative and Problem-oriented Analysis

These papers are exceedingly difficult to execute satisfactorily, and we recognize a pressing need for both greater volume and higher quality. Because of the inherent difficulties and large commitment of time involved, regular exchanges with and feedback from policy consumers are particularly important here. The problem is also one of internal environment—especially incentives—which we address below.

Improving the Analytical Milieu

We are making determined efforts to develop a broad program to improve both the capabilities of our analysts and the milieu in which they work. These are necessarily long lead-time undertakings from which payoffs can be expected only gradually. Among our most important initiatives is our increased emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches to problems. Our principal goal in this respect is not so much to develop new organizational forms as to stimulate the development of broad-gauged individual analytical talent capable of performing high quality integrative analysis.

Another program that we hope will enhance our analytical capabilities is the establishment in FY 78-79 of about a dozen new overseas positions for NFAC analysts. Our people would serve in the missions for two years, but would act as field analysts rather than as collectors. We hope also to be able to send some analysts abroad this year to study.

We intend to strengthen the pre-publication review of key analyses both by improving our internal procedures and by submitting them to outside consultants with relevant background. We have done this several times recently. We have a large number of additional candidate reviewers; our task at the moment is to pare the list and complete administrative procedures to bring them on.

We have given considerable attention to the identification and recruitment of established analysts for lateral entry into our ranks. We have had some success here, and NFAC has recently hired 15 to 20 first-rate analysts from among senior DDO officers with extensive experience abroad. We have had little success in attracting officers from other departments, such as State, Treasury, etc. They do not see a rotational tour at CIA as contributing to their career growth in their home bureaucracies.

We continue to try to alter our incentives and rewards to encourage analysts to produce more venturesome analyses. But there are an increasing number of requests for immediate support in the form of briefings, typescript memoranda, graphics, etc. These projects are highly labor intensive, but have the attraction of immediate feedback from the recipients. Production office managers and analysts have strong incentives to give such work the highest priority. In particular, analysts are reluctant to forego the excitement and rewards associated with shorter term work in favor of deferred praise for projects that take more time to complete. The policy community tends by its demands and responses to reinforce the short-term focus.

One way to cope with this latter problem is to isolate more first-rate analysts from the daily fray. On key areas, however, we do this at our peril since we often do not have enough analyst depth to ensure strong output of both kinds. Not surprisingly, our best in-depth analysts tend also to be best at firefighting. We hope to ease this problem by adding analysts to the corps in both FY 79 and FY 80. And we should be able to enhance our analytical strength by more frequent resort to carefully managed contractors who can concentrate on single important problems without the daily distractions that our analysts face.

Contributions and Reviews by Chiefs of Station

As you point out, Chiefs of Station often do have good understanding of the political dynamics of the countries in which they serve although this varies among individuals. they often send in their analyses of problems known to be receiving policy attention in Washington. And NFAC often asks them for specific contributions to analytical efforts, especially when responding to a request from a policy official or engaging in a community-wide project. Because of time pressure, COS reviews of draft papers have been rather rare, though we do at times receive their comments after papers are published.

We endorse the recommendation that Chiefs of Station with special knowledge provide more frequent field assessments, and when time permits NFAC will continue to seek contributions to its assessments--again, especially when engaged in a policy-directed interagency undertaking. We will also seek Station Chief comments on draft papers, especially on those sections of drafts that would most benefit from a close feel for the local scene.

In all candor, I would also have to add that as helpful as your memorandum of 14 January has been in providing us guidance, it has simultaneously raised apprehensions within the Department of State and a number of embassies. There is a concern that the Agency is being

encouraged to get more into political reporting which Ambassadors view as their province. Clearly, we do not want to encourage those duplications of effort. At the same time, our Ambassadors are superb political reporters. They are also part of the policymaking machinery of the Executive Branch. The Chiefs of Station are not associated with policymaking and their views on the political situation should be encouraged.

Clandestine Collection

As you know, in February we sent you a sample clandestine collection plan [redacted] countries that you said were of special interest. After some guidance from your staff, we have revised our format slightly. I am transmitting to you at this time two more plans [redacted] (Attachment 2). As you have suggested, we will send you additional plans as they are completed, rather than waiting to send all at one time. You will note that the plans have considerable information about the allocation of Station efforts, the information needs and objectives against which each Station is working, and they describe our intention to enhance the clandestine effort against the host countries. Each plan also discusses the operational environment in which the Station must operate, including such factors as the presence of hostile intelligence services and other various constraints on CIA activities.

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With respect to your concern that our clandestine collection does not provide us express information on the intentions and activities of the Soviet Union and other countries, I can only suggest that you may be hoping for more than is likely to be possible. At the same time, we have only had a heavy emphasis on the "hard targets" for about six years. The full dividends of this activity may not have paid off as yet. I suspect that more can be done to target these clandestine sources in accordance with our priority needs. I hope the combination of more explicit guidance on priorities from the PRC(I) and the existence of the National Intelligence Tasking Center will encourage us better to target human clandestine sources.

It is my personal evaluation that it would be unwise at this time to increase the emphasis on "hard target" operations. So much reward has already been attached to the recruitment of hard targets that any more emphasis in this area could, in my opinion, have deleterious effects on our operations against local targets and regional or international issues such as terrorism, world trade, etc. I believe the most necessary step to improve our clandestine collection, as brought out in our dinner meeting of 27 October, will be the reallocation of some of the clandestine assets to areas of growing interest. We are already undertaking such actions

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[redacted]
to augment our resources. We are in the process of developing a more comprehensive plan of our overall desires for the reallocation of clandestine assets.

Interagency Action to Improve the Collection and Analysis of Political Intelligence

In your memorandum of 10 April, you asked me to recommend inter-agency action to improve the collection and analysis of political intelligence. On the collection side, I propose that [] my Deputy for Collection Tasking, conduct a review of all forms of collection for each of the [] countries. He will report on capabilities, information gaps, and will develop plans to deploy our capabilities for the optimum collection of political intelligence. The DDO's work [] will be included in limited detail in this broader context, as well as treated completely in the specific reports to you that I mentioned above.

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In an effort to help define the effectiveness of present collection programs and indicate some of our general information needs, the Office of Regional and Political Analysis has prepared a study, Political Intelligence Around the World. I am sending you a copy of this document for your information (Attachment 3). It will be a useful point of departure for the collection tasking effort that I have outlined above.

I have asked NFAC to take the lead in developing a community-wide plan to improve the quality of analysis. There have already been meetings between NFAC, DIA, and State Department on this subject, and a working group is developing a report that will follow the outline of the NFAC internal study that I am transmitting with this memorandum. You should have the community plan in hand within a month.

I recommend that you come out to the Agency at your earliest convenience to discuss these matters with the clandestine service and the National Foreign Assessment Center. My suggestion is that we have a one-hour meeting with John McMahon and his clandestine service people to discuss their problems, techniques and plans; and another one-hour session, perhaps including lunch, with Bob Bowie/Sayre Stevens and the key analytic leaders to discuss what they feel they can do with regard to your concerns on political analysis.



STANSFIELD TURNER

3 Attachments

1. Memorandum from Robert R. Bowie
2. []
3. Political Intelligence Around the World

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